

FEURT SITE POTSDHERDS AT THE CLARK COUNTY HISTORICAL SOCIETY HERITAGE CENTER, SPRINGFIELD, OHIO

by
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Several years ago I wrote an article (Morris, 2006) concerning part of a collection of artifacts from the famous Feurt site in Scioto County, Ohio which has been in the collections of the Clark County Historical Society for the past 70 years. The focus of that paper was to report the lithic, bone, antler and shell material. This paper presents information on the potsherds. The overall Feurt collection, which numbers almost 400 items was donated to the Clark County Historical Society (CCHS) in February, 1940 by Dr. Stanley G. Copeland, then Director of the Ohio State Archaeological and Historical Society. Dr. Copeland was a good friend of Arthur Altick, who at that time was Curator and Secretary of the CCHS. This Feurt Site collection was set up as a display illustrating the Ft. Ancient culture in the CCHS museum, located in Memorial Hall, Springfield, Ohio. Memorial Hall has since been demolished. The entire collection is now housed in the Heritage Center, in downtown Springfield. The writer had the opportunity to inventory, number, and catalog this collection during the spring of 2005.

The Feurt Site

This site is a well known Ft. Ancient village located about 5 miles north of Portsmouth, Ohio on the east side of the Scioto River. Named for Mr. William Feurt, who owned the 400 acre farm on which the site was located, it sits on a river terrace about 40 feet above the Scioto River floodplain. The site had been hunted by local collectors for years with Mr. Charles Wertz of Portsmouth amassing one of the early large collections. Archaeological exploration and excavation of the site, which originally included 3 mounds as well as the village, was done by Warren K. Moorehead in 1896 and later by William C. Mills, assisted by H.C. Shetrone in 1916. The most complete and extensive report on the archaeology and artifacts of the Feurt site is by Mills (1917). Recent work at the site is reported by Kuhn (2008).

The artifacts comprising the CCHS collection were gathered at the site by a number of collectors between February 1937 and December 1939. These people included Dr. Stanley Copeland, as well as his friends Phil Keintz, Dorothy and Ernie Good, Harley Glenn, and others. At least 177 of the Feurt items are labeled with black India ink as to the site itself, as well as the date of collection, i.e. month, day, year and often letter designations such as K - C, which probably refer to the item having been collected on that date by Keintz

and Copeland. Sixty of the Feurt potsherds are marked with India ink information and of these, 35 are dated. The earliest dated item was February 1937 and the last was a potsherd dated December 17, 1939. For more detailed information concerning the Feurt items in the CCHS collection (excluding the potsherds), see Morris (2006).

Feurt Potsherds in the CCHS Collection

A total of 87 potsherds occur in the collection, some of which are quite large measuring 4 to 4 1/2 inches across. Of these, 45 are rimsherds consisting of a portion of the rim and part of the wall of the vessel (pot). Most of these rimsherds also have a handle or a lug of some type attached to the sherd at or below the rim. The remaining 42 potsherds consist of an assortment of wall fragments with attached broken handles, assorted lugs, and handle attachment scars. Eight potsherds show forms of decoration on the exterior surface. About 10 potsherds represent broken handles. No complete pots occur in the CCHS collection. Mills (1917) reports that no complete pottery vessels were recovered during his 1916 survey; however, he illustrates a complete pot collected by Charles Wertz from the site. The great majority of the potsherds have smooth exterior and interior surfaces. A few show remnants of cord marking below the handle or lug which has been somewhat smoothed.

All of the potsherds, except perhaps 2 or 3, consist of clay that has been tempered with the crushed shells of freshwater mussels. These crushed shell fragments are light in color and are easily visible in the clay. The few sherds without shell contain quartz sand or grit as temper. Why did prehistoric potters as well as modern day potters add temper to their clay? What purpose does temper serve? According to Wirt (1984), temper increases both the plasticity and the porosity of the clay, as well as reducing shrinkage and cracking of the clay (or pot) while it dries. In addition, it increases the ability of the clay to withstand thermal (heat) shock. Ft. Ancient potters in the Ohio Valley region commonly used crushed shell as temper. Hooten (1920) reports that the Madisonville site pottery is made from clay tempered with ground or pulverized *Unio* (mussel) shells. Local clay with crushed shell temper was used by the Ft. Ancient potters at the Fox Farm site in Mason County, Kentucky (Smith, 1910). Ft. Ancient potters at the Turpin site, south of Newtown, Ohio also used crushed shell as temper (Oehler, 1973).

Potsherds with handles

The most common type of handle found on many of these Feurt potsherds are **strap handles**. These consist of a flat or semi-flat strip of clay attached at or just below the rim of the vessel with the other end attached to the wall 1 to 2 inches below. Types of strap handles vary considerably (Figure 1) both in thickness, shape, size, and width. They can range from wide, rather thin varieties which maintain the same width from top to bottom (Figure 1, top left, bottom right) to handles which are widest at the top and taper downward to become narrower at their lower point of attachment (Figure 1, top middle, top right). The strap handle in Figure 1 (top middle) is 2 inches wide at the top tapering to 1 1/4 inches at the bottom with the total length of the handle being 2 1/2 inches. Most strap handles are widest at the top and range from distinct tapering to slight tapering to non-tapering downward. Figure 2 illustrates drawings of strap handles, as well as side views showing relative handle thickness and configuration. Most strap handles range in thickness from 1/4 - 3/8 inches. There are 15 potsherds with strap handles in the collection.

The other type of handle present is what I call a **cylindrical loop handle**. These handles are attached in the same location as strap handles, oriented vertically with one end attached at/or just below the rim and the other end below on the exterior wall of the vessel. These handles (Figures 3 and 4) are nearly cylindrical in cross-section and generally have the same width from top to bottom. Overall, they form a distinct loop on the side of the pot when viewed from the side (Figure 4). There are 6 examples in the collection. The handle in Figure 3 (top left) is 2 inches in length and 1/2 - 3/4 inch thick. Two short, fat loop handles are illustrated in Figure 3 (bottom left and middle). Strap handles are generally larger and thinner when compared to cylindrical loop handles.

Potsherds with lugs

The Feurt collection contains 12 rimsherds with several types of lugs located on the exterior of the pot at or slightly below the rim. Lugs represent features protruding outward on the pot exterior that enabled the pot to be handled or lifted during use. Three types of lugs are present. These are the crescent-shaped lugs, the knob-like lugs, and the flared ear-like lugs. **Crescent-shaped lugs** are the most common occurring on 9 rimsherds and are illustrated in Figures 5 and 6. These lugs

are crescent or horseshoe-shaped with the open end or concavity oriented upward on the side of the pot. They are closely associated with the rim and the points (ends) of the crescent commonly extend as two raised projections on the rim (Figure 5, top row). This in turn forms a distinct notch on the rim between the projections (more later). The crescent-shaped lug is attached to the side of the pot along its entire length and protrudes outward from the pot exterior variable amounts. Drawings of normal and side views of crescent-shaped lugs are shown in Figure 6. The width of the crescent ranges from 1 1/2 - 2 1/2 inches and can project outward from the pot wall 1/4 - 1 inch (Figure 6).

Another type of lug present in the collection is the **knob-like lug** (Figure 7, bottom row) and Figure 8 (A and B). This lug is a round, bulbous-shaped projection which is generally located 1/2 - 1 inch below the rim. This lug is almost oval in shape and ranges from 1/4 - 1 inch across. The lug (Figure 7, bottom middle and Figure 8A) projects about 7/8 of an inch from the wall of the pot.

The third type of lug seen is the **flared ear lug** (Figure 7, top row) and Figure 8 (C). These are variable in shape and orientation and also closely related to the rim of the pot. One variety is a simple smooth, curved extension of the rim sort of shaped like an ear, projecting out and slanting upward from the rim (Figure 7, top left and Figure 8C). Other varieties range from a curved ear-like projection that flops down from the rim (Figure 7, top center) to a more horizontal projection (Figure 7, top right). A weird combination of flared ear lug and small knob-like lug is shown in Figure 3 (lower right).

Potsherds with ornamentation

The majority of the potsherds in the collection have a smooth plain exterior surface and are undecorated; however, a few of the sherds illustrate interesting types of decoration. The upper two sherds (Figure 9) show lines of punctations (punctae) on the exterior surface, while the two lower sherds (Figure 9) show incised parallel grooves. The center lower sherd is actually a strap handle marked with parallel grooves; the rimsherd in lower right, marked Feurt Village site, has 6 oblique parallel incised grooves. The left rimsherd (Figure 9) has both oval punctae (4) in a band along the rim, about 46 oval punctae in rows below the band, and oblique incised grooves on both sides of the punctae.

Comparison of Feurt ceramics with other sites

Mills (1917) illustrates four plates of assorted handles, rimsherds, lugs, and decorated potsherds collected during his excavations at the Feurt site in 1916. The strap handles, crescent-shaped lugs, incised grooves and other types of decoration are identical to many of the Feurt items in the CCHS collection. He also illustrates 4 crescent-shaped lugs (he calls handles)

which extend upward into two projections along the rim forming a medial notch between them, very similar to those shown in Figure 5 and Figure 6 (A,B,C and F).

From June through August 1895, Harlan I. Smith made extensive collections of artifacts for the American Museum of Natural History at the Fox Farm site in Mason County, Kentucky. His report (Smith, 1910) contains 8 plates illustrating the types of ceramic artifacts he recovered, many of which are very similar to the Feurt site material. Strap handles, some wider at the top and tapering downward, others the same width top to bottom are exactly like the Feurt items. He also illustrates cylindrical loop handles and several with two projections (he calls "nipples") along the rim forming a medial notch above the handle. Another of Smith's plates shows 7 crescent-shaped lugs on rimsherds, several of which show two projections with a medial notch again almost exactly like the Feurt material. Flared ear-like lugs are also illustrated.

The pair of raised projections on the rim forming a medial notch between (Figures 5 and 6) might be an ornamental or effigy feature. It could perhaps represent the ears of an animal, such as a rabbit or wolf. On the other hand, the two projections and medial notch might be a functional feature? A hypothetical scenario follows. If a pottery vessel had these features on opposite sides of the rim, a thin stick could be positioned in the notches across the pot and the projections would hold it in place. Then a cord attached to the middle of the stick from which an object is suspended could dangle down into the pot. In this way, a small bundle of roots, herbs, or other food-stuffs could be suspended into the pot and its contents. This is just a thought, but perhaps possible. The effigy interpretation seems more plausible.

According to Hooten (1920), pottery from the famous Ft. Ancient site near Madisonville, Ohio compares favorably with ceramics from both the Feurt site and the Gartner site, near Chillicothe. Two of the Madisonville pots are illustrated (Figure 10) and both show examples of strap handles (4) attached at the rim edge, and which taper in width from top to bottom. This is very similar to the type and location of many of the strap handles on the Feurt rimsherds. Hooten interprets the handles, either 2 or 4 in number, were used to hold bands or thongs in place to which suspending cords were attached.

According to information from the Anthropology Museum at Northern Kentucky University (web site), pottery handles or lugs were used for the first time in the Early period of the Ft. Ancient culture. Both strap and loop handles were used and strap handles persisted through the Middle and Late Ft. Ancient periods. Triangular shaped strap handles were made during the later Ft. Ancient periods.

Although the Feurt collection in the CCHS consists only of potsherds, a nearly complete, reconstructed Feurt pot is shown in Figure 11. This highly fractured pot, which

has been carefully pieced together and restored by the late Raymond Downey, was collected at the Feurt site in November 1932. The pot is 14 inches in height, 13 1/2 inches in maximum diameter, and has a diameter of 12 inches at the rim. It appears to have at least two non-tapering strap handles. The pot is in the collection of Terry Chase (Cedar Creek, Missouri) who kindly allowed me to photograph it. Presumably, this pot represents a good example of the size and shape of some of the pottery vessels used by the Feurt people.

Conclusion

The purpose of this paper was to present details of the potsherds from the Feurt site in the Clark County Historical Society collections. I am not an expert on prehistoric pottery, but through the photos, detailed drawings I have done, and descriptions, I have tried to convey to the reader the variety of interesting ceramic features in the collection. In summary, the Ft. Ancient potters at the Feurt site produced pottery which compare very favorably with other Ft. Ancient sites in the Ohio Valley such as Madisonville, Fox Farm, Gartner, and Turpin.

Acknowledgments

I thank Virginia Weygandt, Director of Collections at the CCHS, for allowing me to study, measure and photograph the Feurt material in the collection. I am also grateful to Terry Chase for alerting me to the Feurt pot reconstructed by Raymond Downey and allowing me to photograph it.

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Figure 1 (Morris) Strap handles showing variation in width from tapering to non-tapering. The potsherd (upper right) measures 4 1/2 inches across.

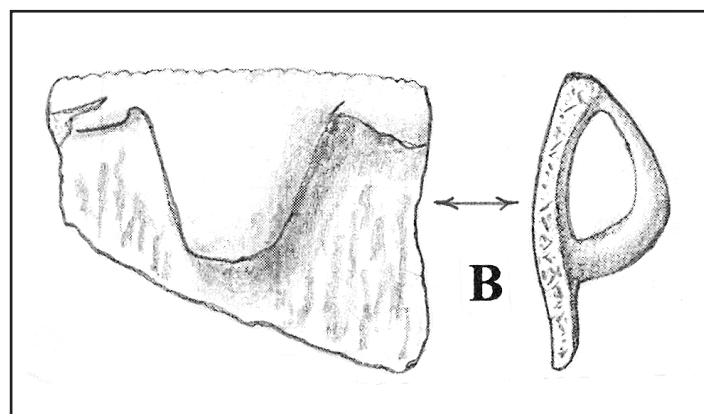
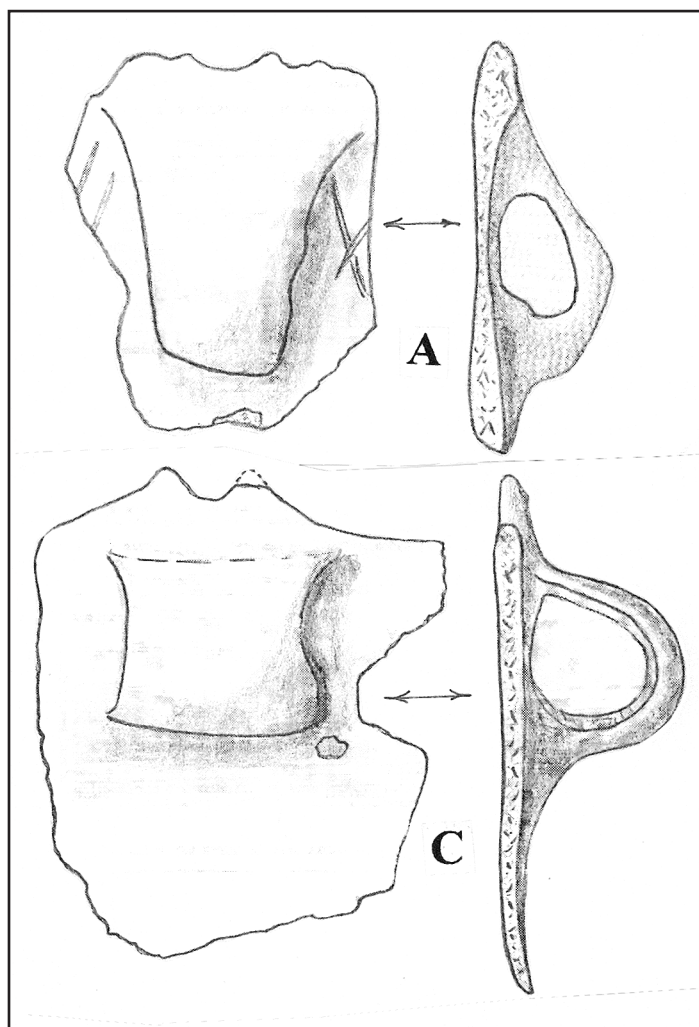


Figure 2 (Morris) Drawings of strap handles showing front and side views. The handle in C is 2 inches wide and 2 inches long



Figure 3 (Morris) Cylindrical loop handles. The potsherd (upper left) is 4 inches across with a 2 1/4 inch handle.

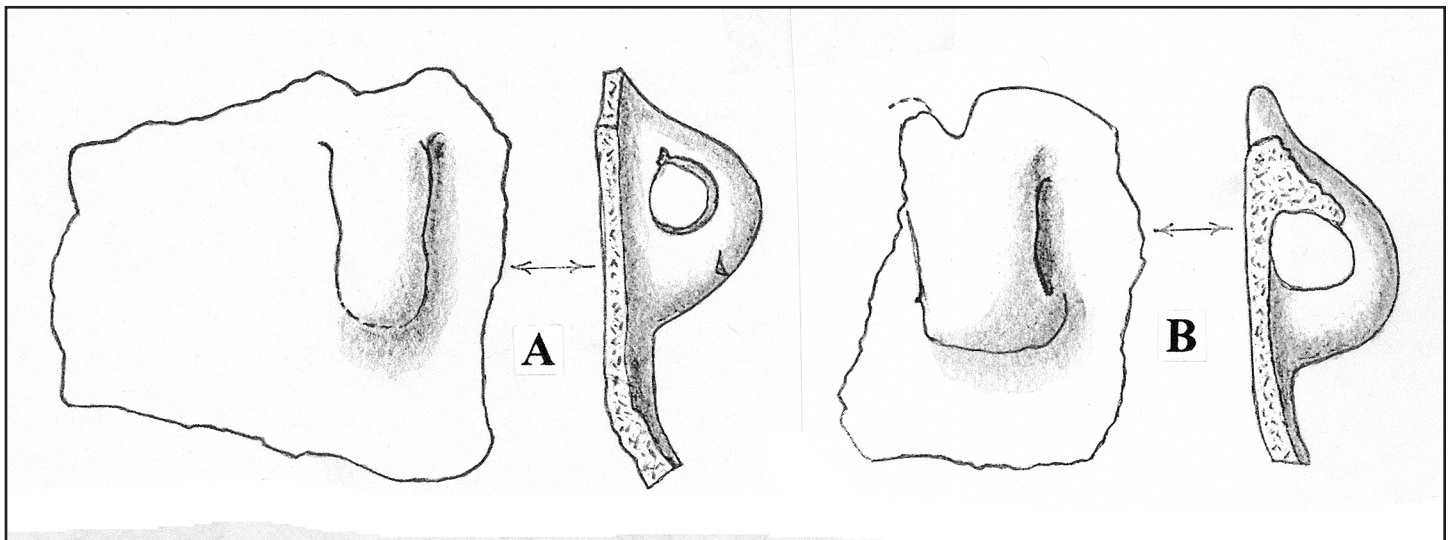


Figure 4 (Morris) Drawings of cylindrical loop handles. Note the notch in the rim above handle in postsherd B.

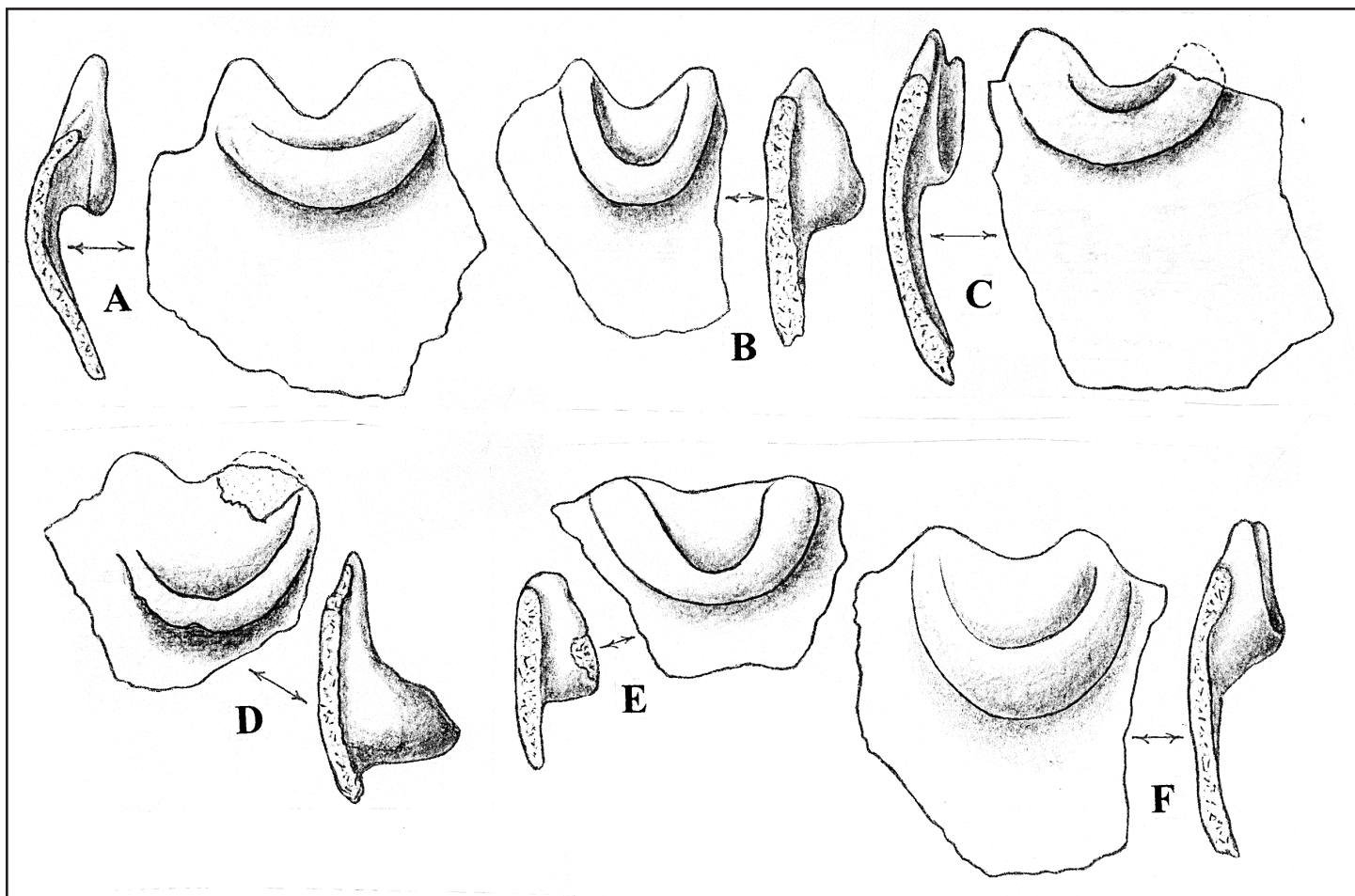


Figure 5 (Morris) Crescent-shaped lugs on rimsherds. Note the two projections on the rim which are extensions of the lug and form a medial notch.



Figure 6 (Morris) Drawings of crescent-shaped lugs showing variations in shape and position.



Figure 7 (Morris) Flared ear-like lugs (top row); Bulbous knob-like lugs (bottom row). All are attached to rimsherds (except lower left).

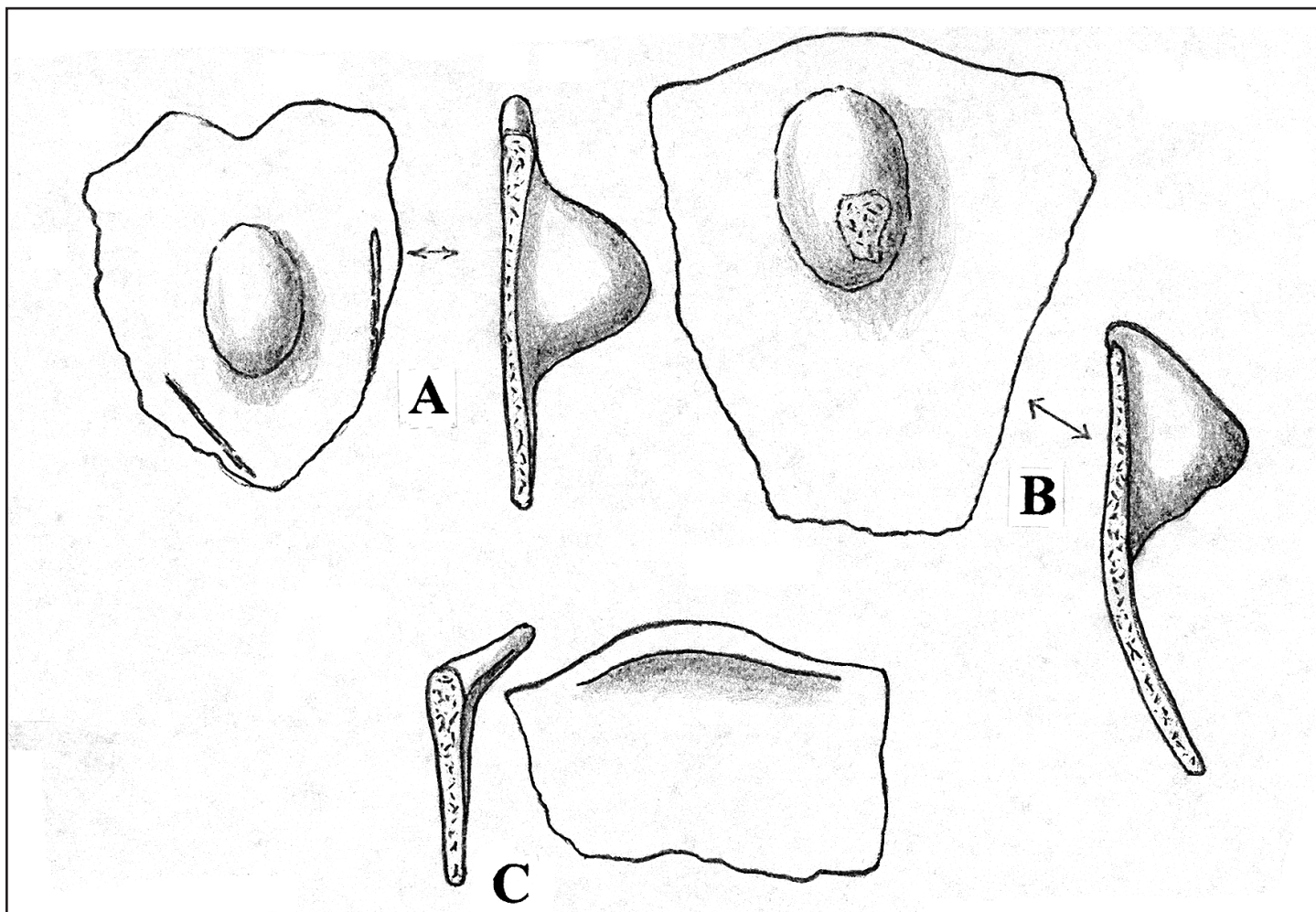


Figure 8 (Morris) Drawings of knob-like lugs (A, B) and a flared ear-like lug (C).



Figure 9 (Morris) Potsherds with decoration. Upper center and right show lines of punctation; lower center and right show parallel incised grooves. Large rimsherd (left) shows both oval punctae (about 50) and parallel incised grooves (about 7).

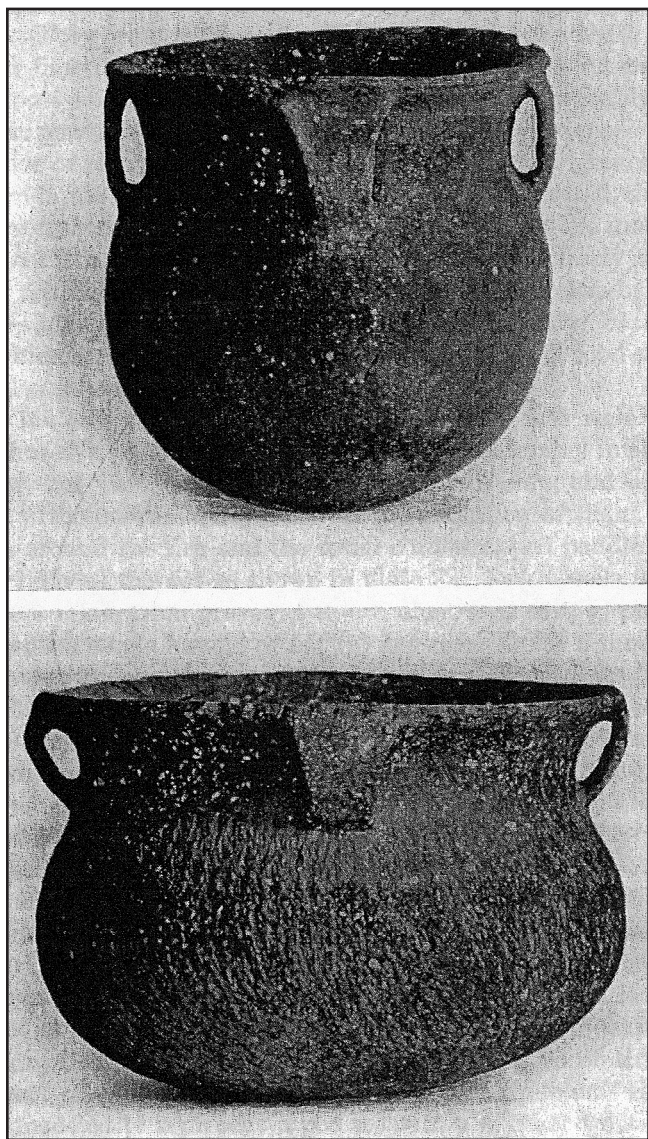


Figure 10 (Morris) Photographs of two pottery vessels from the Madisonville site showing tapering strap handles (taken from Hooten, 1920).



Figure 11 (Morris) Pottery vessel from the Feurt site collected in 1932 and reconstructed by Raymond Downey. The height of the pot is 14 inches.